

Levý, Jiří

Preliminaries to an analysis of the semantic functions of verse

In: *Teorie verše. I, Sborník brněnské versologické konference*, 13.-16. května 1964. Vyd. 1. Brno: Universita J.E. Purkyně, 1966, pp. 127-141

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/119733>

Access Date: 28. 11. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

PRELIMINARIES TO AN ANALYSIS OF THE SEMANTIC FUNCTIONS OF VERSE

JIŘÍ LEVÝ (Brno)

1.0 Attempts to define the meanings of formal components of verse are apt to result in exaggerations of their semantic autonomy and explicitness. It will be our confessed aim to uphold a minimum view of the „meaning“ of form, to consider only the more or less verifiable semantic functions which are more or less independent of subjective interpretation.

The cause of so much difference in opinion, and of so much unwarranted private opinion in this specific branch of research is, in our view, the preponderance of empirical guessing in matters of semantics, at a time when the acoustic problems of verse are already treated with the aid of the methodological and technical instruments of modern linguistics. The first step — though by no means the only one — we can take to remedy this state, is a revision of the semantic problems of verse in terms of modern semantic theory.

1.1 When speaking about the meaning of poetic form, we can either speak (1) of a *symbolic*, or (2) of an *expressive*, or (3) of a *suggestive* function of acoustic form in a poem. In the first case, this would mean that f. ex. dark vowels act as *signs* of a depressive mood, that they simply betoken the presence of this mood in the *poem*: case (2) would mean that they are a vehicle disclosing the mood felt by the *poet*; in case (3) they should be instrumental in awakening this mood in the *reader*. Though poetic form undoubtedly works in all the three ways, the expressive and suggestive functions have been heavily overemphasized, since the Romantic era at the latest, and offer moreover serious obstacles to semantic research: the way in which the reader is affected by prosodic devices could be established by psychological experiments only, and there are practically no objective methods of insight into the expressive functions of form. Under these circumstances, it is only good that modern research into the “emotional meanings” of language stresses their symbolic or representational functions: “A poem may use many emotional words — and phrases — as ‘love’ . . . Or a poem may use emotive sounds, as ‘oh’ and ‘ah’. Or it may use a particular rhythm to fit a particular emotion, a sighing easy rhythm for a tender emotion or a rough harsh rhythm for a strenuous emotion. But the use of these devices is to represent an emotion, not to arouse it . . . On the view that I have been elaborating, to say that the poem is sad would mean that the poem has the emotional quality of sadness. It would not mean that the poem makes the reader sad. The poem *may* make the reader sad, but it also may make him happy — or it may not induce either emotion.”¹ The same trend takes the upper hand in the semantic interpretations of music: “. . .

¹ Sidney Zink, *Is the Music Really Sad?*, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 19, 1960, p. 204.

the conclusion reached in Philosophy in a New Key is that the function of music is not the stimulation of feeling, but expression of it; and furthermore, not the symptomatic expression of feelings that beset the composer but a symbolic expression of the forms of sentence as he understands them."² We shall have occasion to resume the idea of the forms of sentence.

2.0 If we are going to discuss the functions of acoustic form *qua signum*, our further step should be to say what types of representational functions, of *sign functions*, are effected by the formal components of verse. Among the many semantic systems, the differentiation of signs into symptoms, signals, and symbols by Adam Schaff has the advantage of bringing into consideration the different *levels of meaning*.

2.1 Verse-boundaries and their concomitant features (f. ex. capital letters in English or German poetry) act as *signals*, which (1) make the reader aware of the fact that the utterance he has before him is in verse — and by doing so (2) start or bring to end the processes characteristic of the line as a whole, i. e. the twofold pattern of intonation, rhythmical inertia etc. This is exactly what signals do according to A. Schaff: "We are in agreement with the common and contemporary meaning of the term 'signal', if we understand by it a sign whose aim it is to start or bring to end a certain activity."³

Verse form in general performs the function of a signal: "The very fact that verse was used as a form of expression (and not 'unbound' speech) has specific connotations, which, however, are not always the same: in the beginning of the 19th century, verse in Czech literature was the specific form of literary expression in general and its use, therefore, was symptomatic of the specific character of the utterance (we should say to-day of its 'literary' character), i.e. of the fact that this is not a message serving for practical purposes; in our time, the use of verse is symptomatic of the lyrical character of the utterance. During the times of Sv. Čech, non-stanzaic verse was a sign of an epic in high style."⁴ Syllabic verse in Czech poetry is a signal associating the poem with folklore poetry, hexameter induces the reader to see it against a classical background, and so on. These, and many others, are consciously used devices designed primarily not to communicate to the reader a conceptual meaning, but to influence his "reading" of the poetic text.

2.2 The semantic function of some prosodic means is of a still lower order, taking on the character of a mere *symptom*: "Natural signs (symptoms) . . . are not a conscious device used by man for communication effects, but they exist independently from him as natural processes and are used by man *ex post* only as a source of information . . . as if they were normal signs."⁵

Changes of speed imparted to sections of Shakespeare's blankverse by slurring or by hovering accent were analysed, e. g. by W. Draper,⁶ as being symptomatic of hesitation, precipitation, balance or disharmony in Shakespeare's characters. Cases of internal harmony (that is to say a succession of equal or analogous

² Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form*, New York 1953, p. 28.

³ Adam Schaff, *Wstęp do semantyki*, Warszawa 1960, p. 260.

⁴ Josef Hrabák, *Z problémů českého verše*, Praha 1964, p. 15.

⁵ Adam Schaff, *Wstęp do semantyki*, Warszawa 1960, p. 260.

⁶ Cp. J. W. Draper, *Pattern of Humor and Tempo in Othello*, English Studies (Groningen) 28. p. 65 ff; J. W. Draper, *The Twelfth Night of Shakespeare's Audience*, Stanford UP 1950; etc.

sounds) may be symptomatic of that vague semantic quality which usually is described as "lyrical mood". Specific syntactic constructions may be symptomatic of the author's way of thinking, i. e. of specific ways of developing and combining his ideas. Or speaking in general terms: unintentional traits of style may be analysed as a complex of symptoms reflecting the structure of the poet's psyche.

Very often, the resulting effect cannot be assessed without taking into consideration the context and intention of the poem. Double or triple rhymes, especially when transcending the word-limit (Byron: Julia — truly a — newly a), act as signals calling the reader's attention to the fact that the meaning of the poem is ironical; in serious poetry, the signal may be misdirecting and either debase to the function of a mere symptom, or produce disturbing effects.

2.3 It is not often that we may speak in connection with acoustic form of a *symbolic* meaning *sensu stricto* — if by symbol we mean the conventional representation of an abstract concept by means of a sign the external form of which is sensual.

Onomatopoeic sounds, especially consonants or whole syllables, certainly may communicate an abstract idea by acoustic means, e. g. the idea of rustling by an accumulation of sibilants:

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain

(E. A. Poe)

The meaning of sibilants in this line, however, is not based on convention, but on physical likeness.

John Hollander speaks of an emblematic, i.e. symbolic, meaning of metre in connection with conventional measures and stanzas: "... the sonnet form itself is like a title, in that it serves to set up a literary context around the utterance, directing the reader to give to it a certain kind of attention just as the frame around a picture can urge the viewer to look at the picture in a particular way... Now this titling, framing (or, as I shall call it, *emblematic* or *badgelike*) function of metre is no less a distinctive operation than are those of smaller elements of the poem."⁷ The semantic function of traditional stanzas, however, is more complex: it not only communicates the abstract idea of "sonnet", "ottava rima", but it also predisposes the reader to read the poem against the background of a definite stylistic convention, acting at the same time as a signal.

An example of the exceptional cases when metrical form acts as symbol are metrical quotations alluding to specific authors or specific types of poetry. They are more frequent in music, where the variety of forms is greater and therefore quotations can be more specific and distinct in character.

3.1 Of fundamental importance from the genetic point of view is the distinction between *a-priori* and *a-posteriori* semantic values, as introduced by Claude Lévi Strauss: „Si nous admettons donc, conformément au principe saussurien, que rien ne prédestine *a priori* certains groupes de sons à désigner certains objets, il n'en semble pas moins probable qu'une fois adoptés, ces groupes de sons affectent de

⁷ John Hollander, *The Metrical Emblem*, *Kenyon Review* 31, 1959, p. 294.

nuances particulières le contenu sémantique qui leur est lié... Quand nous envisageons le vocabulaire *a posteriori*, c'est à dire déjà constitué, les mots perdent beaucoup de leur arbitraire, car le sens que nous leurs donnons n'est plus fonction seulement d'une convention."⁸

Conjectures of *a-priori* semantic values of acoustic elements, which take for granted the existence of specific psychophysiological reactions to certain sounds, flourished in the times of Maurice Grammont and of the *fin-de-siècle* poets; it is rather uncommon for a modern student of verse to profess them: „Les voyelles nasales dominent souvent, dans les poèmes français erotiques. Les nasales évoquent ici le son nasillard qui se produit par suite du relâchement de la luette dans les moments du désir amoureux."⁹ The psycho-physiological correlations postulated by Iván Fónagy are a problem of physiology, not of poetics, and should be subject to verification by physiological or psychological methods. A higher degree of probability have those of the statistical results which are at the same time based on a morphological analogy between sound and sense: „Es scheint ganz unabhängig vom Wortschatz der einzelnen Sprachen in den Gedichten ein panchronischer Zusammenhang zwischen Aggressivität und ‚harter‘ Konsonanz einerseits, zwischen ‚weicher‘ Konsonanz und zärtlicher Milde andererseits zu bestehen."¹⁰

It might be expedient to view against the background of *a-priori* and *a-posteriori* semantic functions the results of morphemic analysis undertaken by Dwight L. Bolinger¹¹ (and other American scholars). Let us quote an application of morphemic analysis to poetics by Laurence Perrine: “In addition to onomatopoeic words is another group of words, sometimes called *phonetic intensives*, where sound, by a process yet obscure, to some degree suggests their meaning. An initial *fl-* sound, for instance, is often associated with the idea of moving light, as in *flame, flare, flash, flicker, flimmer*; an initial *gl-* also frequently accompanies the idea of light, usually unmoving, as in *glare, gleam, glint, glow, glisten*. An initial *sl-* often introduces words meaning ‘smoothly wet’, as in *slippery, slick, slide, slime, slop, slosh, slobber, slushy*. Short *-i-* often goes with the idea of smallness... None of these various sounds is invariably associated with the idea which it seems to suggest, and, in fact, a short *-i-* is found in *thick* as well as *thin*, in *big* as well as *little*. Language is a complex phenomenon. But there is enough association between these sounds and ideas to suggest some sort of intrinsic if obscure relationship, and a word like *flicker*, though not onomatopoeic, for it does not refer to sound, would seem somehow to suggest its sense, the *fl-* suggesting moving light, the *-i-* suggesting smallness, the *-ck-* suggesting sudden cessation of movement (as in *crack, peck, pick, hack, and flick*), and the *-er-* suggesting repetition.”¹²

First of all, it would be of interest to learn the two following things:

(1) If all the existing sounds, or combinations of sounds, of a language and all the existing segments of meaning are considered as two sets, are the coincidences registered by Bolinger significant, or are they a “normal” result of chance correla-

⁸ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, Paris 1957, p. 106–107.

⁹ Iván Fónagy, *A Költői nyelv hangtanából*, Budapest 1959, p. 89. Translated into French by A. Kibédi Varga, *Les Constantes du poème*. Den Haag 1963, p. 242.

¹⁰ Iván Fónagy, *Informationsgehalt von Wort und Laut in der Dichtung*, Poetics, Warszawa 1961, p. 600.

¹¹ Cp. Dwight L. Bolinger, *Rime, Assonance and Morpheme Analysis*, Word 6, 1950, p. 117–136.

¹² Laurence Perrine, *Sound and Sense*, New York 1956, p. 169.

tions between two sets with unequal distribution of units? A general tendency towards a parallel arrangement of the two sets is probable: "Words similar in sound are drawn together in meaning . . . Any conspicuous similarity in sound is evaluated in respect to similarity and / or dissimilarity of meaning."¹³ It would be necessary, however, to compute the strength of this correlation in the specific cases. By a simple comparison of the number of instances quoted by Perrine with the total number of words in *sl-*, *gl-* etc., we shall find that a few % out of the total number of words share the specific meaning: 6% in *sl-*, 4% in *gl-*, 2% in *fl-*.

(2) Even if the coincidences should prove significant and not fortuitous, the question is how much of the conjectured semantic value enters the consciousness (or unconsciousness) of the reader? In a reader who knows the language, there undoubtedly may be induced an *a-posteriori* expectation that a word beginning in *gl-* will mean moving light rather than anything else, since semantic dispersion in such cases is reduced (or the predictability heightened) and can be computed. It would be necessary, however, to find by psychological experiments what degree of 'semantic concentration', or what contextual agents are sufficient to produce *a-posteriori* semantic effects. Before the results of morphemic analysis can become a reliable tool of prosodic research, at least these two preliminary questions ought to be answered.

The question of an *a-priori* or *a-posteriori* character of the semantic functions attributed to verse turns up whenever the semantics of verse are under consideration. By way of example, let us quote two appraisals of the semantic character of Czech dactylic verse by K. Horálek:¹⁴ (1) ". . . in itself, this characteristic type of dactylic verse means a strong orientation towards prose." (2) "The relative rarity of dactylic verse of the Bezruč type in modern Czech poetry may be explained in other ways too. It is possible, first of all, that so close an association between the metre and the theme took place that dactylic verse after Bezruč came to be considered as an ingredient of the disquieting social theme and therefore ceased to be applicable to other themes." In the first case, dactylic verse "means" prose because it is morphologically akin to the dactylo-trochaic rhythm of Czech prose; this is an *a-priori* meaning independent of the reader's experience. In the second case, the meaning of metre is based on usage; an *a-posteriori* meaning, as a rule, is less stable in character: it is subject to historical changes and may apply to one part of the readers only. To this category belong the traditional connotations of metrical forms, stylistic types etc.

Some of the semantic effects of verse are due to an interplay of *a-priori* and *a-posteriori* semantic values. That is what Craig La Drière found in the case of onomatopoeia, though he expressed it in other words: "Onomatopoeia is a coincidence of two meanings or strands of meanings, one 'natural' or extralexical, the other conventional lexical signification; concord or conformity of this sort between sound and meaning is an impossibility. The concord is of natural, or at least prelexical or paralexical suggestion of the sound with its conventional reference."¹⁵ We also find cases of tension between the two semantic values; e.g. the English dactylic hexameter tends *a-priori* to be quick and sprightly and therefore suitable

¹³ Roman Jakobson, *Linguistic and Poetics, Style in Language*, New York 1960, p. 196.

¹⁴ Karel Horálek, *Studie k popisu Bezručova verše, Pět studií o Petru Bezručovi*, Olomouc 1947, p. 157, 156.

¹⁵ Craig La Drière, *Structure, Sound and Meaning, Sound and Poetry*, New York 1957, p. 103.

for humorous or lighthearted poetry; *a-posteriori* associations with the classical tradition predestine it, however, for "elevated" style.

4.0 A question of intrinsic interest is that concerning the motivation of sign functions: are there any inner connections or structural relations (morphological analogies) between the acoustic forms and their meanings? If we accept the terminology of American semantics, where this point of view has been elaborated to greatest subtlety, we are going to discuss the question which of the elements of verse perform the functions of index, icon, or of symbol. We are going to discuss the indexical functions only, since the meaning of symbol seen from this point of view is not essentially different from that discussed under 2.3: "There is, however, a third totally different order of signs, which become such, not by virtue of any character of their own as things, nor by virtue of any real connection with the objects but simply by virtue of being represented by signs."¹⁶

4.1 This is the definition of *index* by Charles Sanders Peirce: "There are other signs which become such by virtue of being really connected with their objects. Such is a symptom of disease, or the letters attached to parts of a diagram. The external meaning of such a sign is its most prominent feature. Its internal meaning may be vanishingly small, as in the case of the letters on the diagram, without ever utterly disappearing. . . . There is, however, an important distinction between two classes of indices. Namely, some merely stand for things or individual quasi-things with which the interpreting mind is already acquainted, while others may be used to ascertain facts. Of the former class, which may be termed *designations*, personal, demonstrative, and relative pronouns, proper names, the letters attached to a geometrical figure, and the ordinary letters of algebra are examples. They act to force the attention to the thing intended. Designations are absolutely indispensable both to communication and to thought. No assertion has any meaning unless there is some designation to show whether the universe of reality or what universe of fiction is referred to. The other class of indices may be called *reagents*. Thus water placed in a vessel is clean or not. . . . A scream for help is not only intended to force upon the mind the knowledge that help is wanted, but also to force the will to accord it. It is, therefore, a reagent used rhetorically. Just as a designation can denote nothing unless the mind is already acquainted with its connection with the mind it indicates."¹⁷ This extensive quotation was necessary to show the point of view from which meaning is investigated here: the important points are the relation between the internal and the external meanings of the sign and the sort of external meaning it performs; this is a marked difference from e. g. the semantic categories of A. Schaff (though, of course, a sign may be both a symptom and an index at the same time). A later explanation of the term by Max Bense will show the present usage of the term with yet greater clarity: "Index ist ein Zeichen, wenn es auf das, was vermittelt werden soll, nur hinweist, genauer also: eine Anweisung zur Vermittlung, wie z. B. ein Wegweiser, die Angabe einer Seitenzahl u. s. f. Ein Wegweiser, der auf einen Wald hinweist, kann nun zugleich auch das kartographische Zeichen eines Kugelbaumes zeigen. Ein Index kann demnach also durchaus ikonisch sein."¹⁸

¹⁶ *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. VIII, Harvard UP 1958, p. 92.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92, 241-242.

¹⁸ Max Bense, *Theorie der Texte — Eine Einführung in neuere Auffassungen und Methoden*, Köln 1962, p. 36.

Indexical meanings in poetry, because of lack of an "inner meaning", are generally not taken into account in semantic analysis. In the lines

Those lips are thine — thy own sweet smile, I see,
The same, that oft in childhood solaced me;
Voice only fails, else, how distinct they say,
"Grieve not, my child, chase all thy fears away!"

(W. Cowper)

the only meaning which the pairs of words *see* — *me*, *say* — *away* are sure to impart to any reader familiar with poetry and its conventions is the meaning "this is a rhyme", or "this is a rhymed poem"; this is a designation showing "what universe of fiction is referred to", i.e. that this utterance belongs among the class of rhymed poetry. In some cases, as in the one quoted above, the index is more specific in character, telling to the reader f.ex. "you may expect a recurrence of the final syllable every second line" — just as a roadmarker informs the tourist he may expect a wood in a certain direction.

The system of pauses, which constitutes the specific difference between prose and verse, is a vehicle of indexical meanings and these are often the only surplus semantic values an utterance in verse has when compared with the same utterance in prose. Let us examine the following lines from the Ode to the West Wind:

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own?
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

(P. B. Shelley)

In the prose sentence "The tumult of thy mighty harmonies will take from both a deep, autumnal tone", the second half is of greater relevance, since it is the end of sentence which usually brings new facts about the object already known which is mentioned in the first part of the sentence ("the tumult . . "). When divided into two lines, the first part of the sentence becomes equivalent in importance to the second one, and thus the verse-limit acts as a marker forcing the attention to one part of the sentence.¹⁹ The same process, with a higher degree of intensity, operates on the words "My spirit": a maximum of attention is concentrated to an isolated segment of utterance.

Indexical in character is the contrast between prose and verse in some types of drama, disclosing — in a way similar to the functioning of reagents — that speakers in prose are servants or comical characters, while speakers in verse are lords or tragic characters; in some literatures, contrasts between two types of verse are used to the same effect (e. g. in Old Czech drama that between lines of eight and of eleven syllables).²⁰

4.2 An *iconic* sign function is the most strongly motivated relation between

¹⁹ Cp. Josef Hrabák, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 37.

sound and sense, since it is based on a morphological analogy of the two spheres: "An iconic sign, it will be recalled, is any sign which is similar in some respects to what it denotes. Iconicity is thus a matter of degree. It can obviously be a property of auditory and visual signs alike. Spoken language contains some sounds which are clearly iconic ('onomatopoeic'). Some linguists have claimed this quality for certain vowels, and the poet certainly at times reproduces in the rhythm of his words movements of the objects which the poem signifies."²¹ Not without relevance is a further distinction made by Max Bense: "Man kann daher, über Morris hinausgehend, von einem strukturalen und von einem materialen Ikon sprechen. Ein Porträt ist im allgemeinen ein strukturales Ikon, genau wie eine Landkarte. Der Pfiff einer Lokomotive kann in gewisser Hinsicht als ein noch materiales Ikon der Lokomotive aufgefasst werden. Krankheitssymptoms (Schmerzen) sind materiale Ikone."²²

Onomatopoeia is an evident case of the material icon: "cock-a-doodledoo" shares a large part of the acoustic material with the cry of the cock. Onomatopoeic functions are often extended by theoreticians to unwarranted cases: "Les nasales, qu'il s'agisse de *n* ou de *m*, imiterons les bruits nasaux: *nasiller*, *mugir*, *meugler*. Précédés d'une voyelle dans une même syllable, elles seront comme une résonance qui prolonge cette voyelle."²³ Those are simply descriptions of the acoustic character of the single sounds or of their combinations; it would be too rash to believe that they must suggest "meanings" corresponding to their phonetic character. Correspondences between sound and sense are often described on the basis of a likeness not between sound and sense but between their designations: "Le *n*, par exemple, est considéré uniquement sous l'angle de la nasalité".²⁴ Since the designation covers one aspect of the sound only, and perhaps not even the most significant one, its bringing into correlation with meaning may be based on a fortuitous feature.

Structural icons are among the most conclusive cases of semantic relevance of form: a quick succession of syllables may be suggestive of a quick physical movement, the halting of rhythm may suggest hesitation, etc. Often there are psychological reasons for a semantic functioning of form along the lines of morphological analogy: "Mais les perceptions auditives et tactiles produites par des causes analogues sont, en vertu même de cette origine commune apparentées. Le toucher de la main déplacée sur la surface d'un corps rugueux possède certaines qualités formelles; on perçoit une série de chocs discontinus, dans certaines conditions de durée, d'intervalle et d'intensité. Or l'oreille perçoit une structure analogue dans les son 'rugueux'. En dépit de la différence qualitative, l'analogie suffit à exprimer l'emploi du même mot."²⁵ Very often, however, hypotheses of iconic meaning are based on the morphology of unsubstantial aspects of acoustic form and are hardly able, therefore, to be suggestive of "meanings", especially of a specific character. A very primitive case of the iconic fallacy is the belief that the ladderlike lines of Vladimir Mayakovsky serve as an iconis reference to the notion of a ladder in the poem *Commarade Nette*.²⁶

²¹ Charles Morris, *Signs, Language and Behavior*, New York 1946, p. 191.

²² Max Bense, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

²³ Maurice Grammont, *Le vers français*, Paris 1923, p. 33.

²⁴ Paul Delbouille, *Poésie et sonorités*, Paris 1961, p. 34.

²⁵ Paul Guillaume, *La psychologie de la forme*, Paris 1937, p. 193.

²⁶ Leonid Timofejev, *Misto teorie verše v literárněvědném rozboru*, Česká literatura 9, 1961, p. 399.

Since iconic relations, or supposed iconic relations, are the starting point of the greatest part of semantic appraisals of form, we shall postpone a more detailed analysis of this category to part 5.

5.0 After the preliminary classification of terms and of points of view, we shall subject to criticism samples of semantic analyses of the "meaning" in poetry of (1) sounds of speech, (2) rhythm, (3) rhymes.

5.1 The best known and most frequently discussed spokesman of the conjecture about the expressive value of sounds in speech is Maurice Grammont. Let us quote his commentary on the "meaning" of sounds in the wellknown poem "Il pleure dans mon coeur comme il pleut sur la ville" by Paul Verlaine:

"Sans entrer dans le détail de l'analyse, voici les principaux éléments qui entrent en jeu dans cette pièce. D'abord, la répétition des mêmes voyelles dans l'intérieur des vers et à la rime, chaque strophe ayant le même mot comme première et dernière rime, renforcée par la troisième rime . . . De là l'impression de monotonie. En outre le mouvement saccadé, sautillant et continu de la pluie est exprimé tout le long de la pièce par la répétition des consonnes. La pluie physique est surtout peinte par la combinaison des occlusives et des liquides:

*Il pleure dans mon coeur
Comme il pleut sur la ville,
Quelle est cette langueur
Qui pénètre mon coeur?*

Dans la troisième, la pluie morale est surtout exprimée par la combinaison des occlusives et des sifflantes:

*Il pleure sans raison
Dans ce coeur qui s'écoeur.
Quoi! nulle trahison?
Ce deuil est sans raison;*

et de même dans la strophe suivante. Enfin l'affluence des labiales *p*, *b* répand dans toute la pièce comme une note sanglotante; et la seconde rime de chaque strophe, qui n'a pas de correspondante, mais rappelle en général par sa voyelle une autre rime, une autre note de la pièce: *ville* — *pluie*, *écoeur* — *coeur*, *toits* — *pourquoi*, donne à tout le morceau quelque chose de vague et d'imprécis."²⁷

1. Different types of semantic effects are conjectured by Grammont: (a) expression of the poet's feelings ("la pluie morale est exprimée par . . ."), (b) symbolization of notions present in the poem ("la pluie physique est surtout peinte par . . ."), (c) suggestion of impressions to the reader ("impression de monotonie"). In some cases, it is not clear which of the three functions is meant by Grammont (cp. the end of the passage) and it is probable he used the words "peindre", "exprimer" etc. without having decided on any one of the specific effects.

2. We are also left in uncertainty on what basis the semantics of verse are supposed to work: is there an *a-priori* relation between labials and the meaning of physical rain, and between sibilants and the meaning of moral rain — or is there an *a-posteriori* relation induced by the fact that an important word (e. g. "pluie" is echoed by the repetition of its consonants?

²⁷ Maurice Grammont, *op. cit.*, p. 366—367.

3. Among the most plausible are those semantic functions which are based on iconic relations; a rather strong and direct iconic relation is the one between repetition of sounds and monotony. More feebly motivated is the assumption of an iconic relation between an incomplete repetition of the same rhyme and the notion of vagueness or imprecision.

It is evident that the notorious apriorism of Maurice Grammont is accompanied by a general uncertainty as to what is the real character and basis of semantic functions in verse.

5.2 The text of primary importance for a whole series of subsequent analyses of the semantics of *rhythm* is the essay on Mácha's *Máj* by Roman Jakobson.²⁸ This is one of his pronouncements:

"The elementary units of the Czech trochee are words with an even number of syllables (especially with two syllables); their limits coincide with the limits of feet, their accents coincide with the beats of the verse. The impression produced by Czech trochee may be traced back to two elementary components: the *inertia* of regularly repeated wholes and the *descending* tendency of both the single feet and of their grouping. *Repetition* and *fading* are also the elementary semantic functions of trochee." That is to say, the elementary semantic qualities of trochee are governed by the same principles of arrangement as its physical pattern.

The semantic implications of the two principles of arrangement were analysed by Roman Jakobson in greater detail. First, the connotations of *descending* rhythm: "The fading away of sound is interlinked and closely connected in theme with the ideas of low sound, sound in midst of silence, cessation of sound, and of silence, as well as the drooping of light, night, and finally the fading away of life, passive necessity, the resignation of lonely and empty weariness, falling asleep and dreaming, dying and death.

The connotations of a *repetition* of acoustic segments are: "The idea of regular, incessant repetition, perpetuation and everlastingness". — And finally those resulting from a combined working of the two principles: "If both agents — repetition and descending rhythm — are operating and the second one prevails, the idea of a repeated fading away, of eternal losses, becomes manifest".

This implies several *levels of iconic functions*:

1. There is a direct iconic relation between a specific type of *arrangement* of acoustic elements and the *notion* of an analogous *arrangement* — whether it be of sound, light, or of other physical phenomena: the descending intensity of stress is analogous in structure to any process of decreasing intensity.

2. Conjectured relations between acoustic form and a specific notion, especially if it is abstract in character, necessitate one, or several *intermediary* links: descending rhythm → fading away → weariness → resignation → passive necessity; repetition of equal segments → repetition in general → duration [perenniality, lasting] → eternal losses.

When analysing cases of indirect iconic functions, we must keep in mind that many of the abstract notions enter into relations of analogy with several types of arrangement of the acoustic material. E. g. the ideas of eternity, perpetuation, everlastingness may correspond to at least the following distributional patterns: (a) an undifferentiated and unlimited continuum, (b) repetition in cycles, (c) mo-

²⁸ Roman Jakobson, *K popisu Máchova verše*, Torso a tajemství Máchova díla, Praha 1938, p. 207–278.

notonous repetition of equivalent elements. From the point of view of rhythm, this means that also f. ex. the coalescing of words into a continuous series, which is a tendency of Czech iambic verse, or a cyclic repetition of analogous constructions [e. g. in some types of dactylic verse], may promote the idea of duration. That is to say: if we concede that some of the iconic functions mentioned above actually work in verse, then only under the impact of the contents of the poem (i. e. *a-posteriori*) can one of the *a-priori* potentialities of verse start functioning. Statistical results showing a frequent cooccurrence of one type of rhythm with a specific meaning are insufficient as the *only* proof of a semantic function of the form, since in many cases *any* form can support the meaning of the line. The semantic polyvalidity of rhythm accounts for the wide possibilities of subsidiary semantic effects of form, as well as for the limitation of the "meaning" of form, in most cases, to a simple intensification of lexical meanings contained in the text.

5.3 This is how Frank G. Ryder specifies the meaning of *rhymes* in "Flügel der Zeit" by Franz Werfel:

"The constant return of rhyme, effected by cumulative repetitions and close interrelationships, accords with the notion of the wheel and images inevitability and monotony. The drastic restriction of phonemic inventory, tightening the horizons of sound itself, images constriction and ineluctability. The interlock among rhymes and from there into the lines also helps to augment the sense of pervasive monotony, even entrapment. The resistance of stanzaic regularity both implies a harmony or order that must exist somewhere and confirms man's inability to attain it. The fact that eight or ten of the rhyme words constitute a sort of thesaurus of depression has its obvious relevance."²⁹

Let us analyse into their components the relations between sound and sense conjectured by Ryder:

1. *Repetition of sounds* images (a) *monotony* — that is a logical result of repetition; (b) *inevitability* — that already is only one among the possible interpretations of monotony; (c) repetition of sounds accords with the notion of wheel — not every repetition is cyclic in character and even cyclic repetition is evocative rather of a circular movement than of the concrete image of a wheel.

2. *Restriction of phonemic inventory* images *constriction* and *ineluctability*. The first question is: which is the more restrictive situation: (a) when the distribution of sounds is stochastic (i. e. the poet passively yields to the laws of probability), or (b) when the poet prefers certain sounds to others, as in our case (i. e. the poet of his free will limits his inventory of sounds and thus revolts against the probability laws). Question two: what are the psychological correlations of limited choice: (a) *strict order* resulting from deliberate choice, or (b) *security* resulting from an inclusion within the firm limits of choice, or (c) *constriction* resulting from too tight limits? And question three: can form operate at all along lines which are subject to a mediation of a complicated intellectual effort?

3. The *interlock among rhymes* helps to augment the sense of pervasive *monotony*, even *entrapment*. There is again an evident functional relation between physical repetition and monotony, but the specific notion of entrapment is only one of the possible interpretations and would necessitate specific contextual agents to set it working.

4. The *resistance of stanzaic regularity* (a) implies a *harmony or order that must*

²⁹ Frank G. Ryder, *How Rhymed is a Poem?*, Word 19, 1963, No. 3, p. 117.

exist somewhere, (b) confirms man's inability to attain it. Irregular regularity may imply many other ideas besides those suggested by Ryder, and even the context can in this case hardly help to concentrate the meaning to those particular notions, since this requires a large amount of intermediary cogitation. The analogy between stanza and idea being too subtle, it is, in the last end, superficial: it overlooks the gap existing between the emotional suggestions of form and intellectual cogitation.

5. *Eight or ten of the rhyme words constitute a thesaurus of depression.* This is the most direct relation between sound and sense: attention is concentrated on the meaning of words occurring in rhyming positions, and therefore the type of meaning that is frequent there is brought into prominence.

Taking as an example one stanza by Jiří Wolker, we shall demonstrate what we consider to be a realistic attitude towards the semantics of rhyme:

Však znám také věci těžké a nejtěžší,
jež marně vypluly na cestu k ráji;
znám nemocnice a předměstí, lidi, které bůh netěší,
znám koráby z olova, které vždy ztroskotají.
Znám lodníka, který se nesměje,
vraky, vězné a galeje,

The rhyme "které bůh netěší" resumes the idea of "věci těžké a nejtěžší", and the rhyme "koráby . . . ztroskotají" in a new image resumes the idea of "marně vypluly na cestu k ráji"; "galeje" achieves the concentration of the mood of the "lodníka, který se nesměje" into one drastic image. And the rhyming expressions "rozpraskly v půli" — "utonuly" are almost synonymic in meaning and establish a yet closer contact between the components of the metaphorical confrontation of a galley shipwrecked on sea with the galley of life drowned in the eyes. In this stanza, rhymes are a means of reinforcing the logical compactness of images, since rhyming words are either parallel in meaning or take part in the progress of a single idea. This is only one of the possible relations between rhyme and meaning; passages of poetry could be quoted where rhyme brings pairs of words into direct semantic relations productive of secondary associations, or passages where rhyme is devoid of any specific meaning at all. Rhyme is primarily an index of the relation between two words; only under specific circumstances, it takes on secondary and more specific semantic functions.

Conclusion. Semantic interpretations of form are partly based on observations of how the verse really works, and in part they are due to theoretical assumptions of the interpretant. The part played by both agents in theoretical discussions of our problem may be summed up as follows:

1. Though form may suggest, express, or symbolize meanings, interpreters tend to overestimate all the three functions, thus committing what may be called a "semantic fallacy".

2. Form most frequently acts as signal or symptom, and it is in exceptional cases only that it can serve as vehicle of a symbolic function; under the impact of lexical meanings contained in the text, we are tempted to claim symbolic meanings for it too.

3. The acoustics of verse is productive of both *a-priori* and *a-posteriori* meanings; and overestimation of the *a-priori* ones is the most common case of semantic fallacy.

4. Indexical meanings, owing to their "meaningless" character, are more apt to be underrated than to be overrated; an iconic relation between sound and sense is a very plausible explanation of many semantic effects of form but leads to overestimations too.

On the whole, the semantic theory of verse is in an unsatisfactory state of unverified, and often unverifiable, conjectures. If our semantic terminology gains in precision, some of the points may be analysed with a greater reliability. But still we shall continue to move on uncertain grounds, as long as we shall not be able to find a more reliable basis of investigation in a confrontation of the principles of arrangement of both the acoustic and the semantic patterns. That we will attempt to do in a different paper.

PŘEDBĚŽNÉ POZNÁMKY K ANALÝZE SÉMANTICKÝCH FUNKCÍ VERŠE

Cílem studie není řešit problematiku významu formy ve verši, ale přispět ke zpřesnění úvah o tomto tématu zavedením současné sémantické terminologie.

1.0 Mluvíme-li o *symbolické* platnosti akustických prvků, pak předpokládáme, že forma je *znakem* významu, o její *expresivní* funkci mluvíme tehdy, vyjadřuje-li náladu *autora*, o její *su- gestivní* platnosti tehdy, evokuje-li příslušné významové kvality u *čtenáře*.

2.0 Jaký *stupeň* znakového významu jsou prozodické prvky schopny sdělovat?

2.1 Charakter *signálu* (Schaff: „znak, jehož účelem je vyvolat, změnit nebo ukončit určitou činnost“) má např. hranice mezi verši a sám fakt, že promluva je psána ve verších.

2.2 Největší část prozodických faktorů má ve vztahu ke sdělovanému obsahu charakter *pří- znaků* [neintencionální znaky sloužící ex post jako zdroj informace]: změny tempa, intonační schémata apod.

2.3 Jen výjimečně má prozodický prostředek funkci zástupného znaku, *symbolu* [konvenční re- prezentace abstraktního pojmu znakem, jehož vnější podoba je smyslová]: onomatopoeie, rytmické citáty apod.

3.0 Z hlediska *geneze* je účelné lišit *apriorní* významové hodnoty [původu psychofyzilogického, a tudíž společné různým kulturám] a *aposteriorní* významové hodnoty (tj. ustálené teprve kon- venci). Tento problém je v pozadí každé úvahy o „významu“ formy; v současné době bylo by aktuální z tohoto hlediska rozestat aplikaci tzv. morfémové analýzy (Bolinger) na básnický jazyk.

4.0 Podstatná je otázka *motivace* znakových funkcí formy: Jsou nějaké vnitřní souvislosti nebo strukturální vztahy (morfologické analogie) mezi akustickými formami a jejich významy? Tedy v termínech ražených Peircem a Morrisem: kdy má „význam“ formy charakter indexu, ikonu, a kdy symbolu?

4.1 Povahu *indexu* [tj. významu neoznačujícího designandum ale pouze poukazujícího k němu] má ve své nejobecnější podobě „význam“ rýmu, systému pauz, protikladu próza v. verš.

4.2 Jasným případem materiálního *ikonu* je např. onomatopoeie; jako strukturální ikonický znak funguje formální prostředek tehdy, je-li shoda mezi formálním uspořádáním řady akustické a řady sémantické (např. rychlý sled slabik > rychlý pohyb; rytmická pauza > váhání, apod.).

5.0 Po předběžném vyložení pojmů jsou podrobeny kritice typické literárněhistorické komentáře k významu zvukosledu (5.1), rytmu (5.2), rýmu (5.3). Obecně se ukazuje, že věrohodná jsou především ta určení sémantických funkcí, která se opírají o tvarové období mezi uspořádáním akustické a sémantické roviny. Méně věrohodné jsou již hypotézy o specifických významech, jejichž realizace předpokládá přechodový élanek mezi akustikou a sémantikou. A zcela nevěro- hodné jsou „významy“ opírající se spíše o pojmenování akustického prostředku nebo o vzdálenou obraznou analogii.

Závěr. Sémantické interpretace formy se zčásti zakládají na pozorování skutečných funkcí verše a zčásti jsou výsledkem teoretických předpokladů interpretátora. Úlohu obou faktorů v teoretické literatuře o významu formy možno shrnout asi takto:

1. Ačkoliv forma může sugerovat, vyjadřovat i symbolizovat význam, v literárněhistorických roz- berech se zpravidla všechny tři funkce přecenují.

2. Formální prostředek nejčastěji funguje jako signál nebo symptom, a jen výjimečně může

бýt носителем symbolické funkce. Pod vlivem lexikálních významů obsažených v textu jsme sváděni připisovat znakový význam i faktorům formálním.

3. Akustické složky verše jsou nositeli apriorních i aposteriorních významů; přeceňování apriorních funkcí je nejčastější typ významového klamu.

4. Indexové významy se pro svou významovou „neurčitost“ častěji podceňují než přeceňují: ikonický vztah mezi zvukem a smyslem vysvětluje mnohé sémantické účinky formy, ale vede také k přeceňování.

Vcelku se sémantika verše stále ještě pohybuje v oblasti neověřených hypotéz a impresí. Zpřesnění sémantické terminologie může přispět k vyjasnění některých otázek. Cílem ovšem musí být rozbor na základě konfrontace uspořádání roviny zvukové a roviny sémantické; to bude tématem jiné studie.

ПРЕДВАРИТЕЛЬНЫЕ ЗАМЕТКИ К АНАЛИЗУ СЕМАНТИЧЕСКИХ ФУНКЦИЙ СТИХА

Автор статьи не ставит себе цели решать проблематику смысла формы в стихе, но стремится сделать посильный вклад в дело уточнения этой темы путем введения современной семантической терминологии.

1.0 Если мы говорим о *символической* действительности акустических элементов, то можно предположить, что форма является знаком значения; о ее *экспрессивной* функции говорим тогда, если она выражает настроение автора, о ее *суггестивной* действительности тогда, если она вызывает соответствующие смысловые качества у читателя.

2.0 Какую степень знакового значения способны передавать просодические элементы?

2.1 Характер *сигнала* (Schaff, Шафф: „знак, целью которого является вызвать, изменить или закончить определенную деятельность“), например, имеет граница между стихами и тот факт, что высказывание написано стихами.

2.2 Самая большая часть просодических факторов по отношению к сообщаемому содержанию обладает характером *признаков* (неинтенциональные знаки, служащие ех post как источник информации): изменения темпа, интонационные схемы и т. п.

2.3 Лишь в исключительных случаях просодические средства обладают функцией замещающего знака, *символа* (конвенциональное представление абстрактного понятия является знаком, внешний вид которого воспринимается чувствами): звукоподражание, ритмические цитаты и т. п.

3.0 С точки зрения *генезиса* является целесообразным различать *априорные* семантические качества (психофизиологического происхождения, следовательно общие для различных культур) и *апостериорные* семантические качества (т. е. те, которые стали устойчивыми только в результате конвенции). Эта проблема выступает на фоне любого рассуждения о „значении“ формы. В настоящее время было бы актуальным рассмотреть с этой точки зрения применение так называемого морфемного анализа (Болингер) применительно к поэтической лексике.

4.0 Существенным является вопрос *мотивировки* знаковых функций формы: появляются ли какие то внутренние связи или структурные взаимоотношения (морфологические аналогии) между акустическими формами и их значением? Следовательно, в терминах установленных Персом и Моррисом, когда „значение“ формы имеет характер индекса, икона и когда становится символом?

4.1 Характер *индекса* (т. е. значения не отмеченного деизгнанда, а только на него указывающего) имеет в своем наиболее общем виде „значение“ рифмы, системы пауз, противопоставления прозы стиху.

4.2 Ярким примером материального *икона* является, например, звукоподражание; как структуральный иконический знак действует формальное средство в том случае, если имеется соответствие между формальной расстановкой акустического ряда и ряда семантического (например, быстрое чередование слогов [быстрота движения; ритмическая пауза] колебание и т. п.).

5.0 После предварительного изложения понятий подвергаются критике типичные литературно-исторические комментарии, относящиеся к значению инструментировки (5.1), ритма (5.2), рифмы (5.3). Общеизвестно, что правдоподобными являются прежде всего те утверждения семантических функций, которые опираются на аналогии между расположением акустических форм и семантической области. Менее правдоподобным уже являются гипотезы о специфических значениях, реализация которых предполагает переходное

звено между акустикой и семантикой. Совершенно невероятными являются „значения“, опирающиеся скорее на наименования акустического средства или же на отдаленную об-разную аналогию.

Заключение. Семантические интерпретации формы отчасти основываются на наблюдении действительных функций стиха, а отчасти являются результатом теоретических предполо-жений интерпретатора. Роль обоих факторов в теоретической литературе о значении формы можно определить приблизительно таким образом:

1. Несмотря на то, что форма может внушать, выражать и символизировать значение, в литературно-исторических анализах всем трем функциям обычно придается слишком боль-шое значение.

2. Формальное средство чаще всего выступает в роли сигнала, или же симптома, и лишь в виде исключения может быть носителем символической функции. Под влиянием лекси-ческих значений, содержащихся в тексте, мы проявляем склонность приписывать знаковое значение даже и формальным факторам.

3. Акустические элементы стиха являются носителями априорных и апостериорных значений; переоценка априорных смысловых функций — это наиболее часто встречающийся тип смыслового обмана.

4. Индексные значения из-за своей смысловой „неопределенности“ скорее умаляют, чем переоценивают; иконические взаимоотношения между звуком и смыслом объясняют многие семантические воздействия формы, однако они также ведут к переоценке.

В общем семантика стиха еще находится в области непроверенных гипотез и впечатлений. Уточнение семантической терминологии может помочь делу объяснения некоторых вопросов. Целью, разумеется, должен быть анализ, основанный на сопоставлении области звуковой и семантической; но это будет темой другого исследования.

Перевела Вера Новотная

